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Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

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Thursday, 27 August 2015, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Ogwu	(Nigeria)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Mrs. Jakubonė
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Spain	Mr. Gasso Matoses
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramirez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/651)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/651)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/651, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: Since the conflict began, over a quarter of a million people have been killed in Syria and more than 1 million have been injured. Some 7.6 million people have been displaced inside the country. Over 1 million people have had to leave their homes this year alone. Over 4 million people have fled across borders in a desperate search of survival and a future, placing host countries and communities under pressure — and now stretched to the breaking point. We may all be living on borrowed time. In the name of both security as well as humanity, we need to find a better, more sustainable way forward for the wider international community to share the burden in hosting Syrian refugees.

Over the past month, violence has continued to escalate across the country. Indiscriminate and targeted attacks by all parties to the conflict have resulted in loss of life and the destruction of infrastructure. In addition, access to basic services, such as water, has been denied to hundreds of thousands of Syrians.

On 12 and 16 August, Government airstrikes hit a market place in Duma, killing over 100 people and injuring many more. The attack took place just a few days after the indiscriminate shelling of Damascus by non-State armed groups. Despite the outrage and condemnations, there has since been at least one further similar attack. According to reports, since mid-August, approximately 200 people have been killed and 400 injured in eastern Al-Ghutah. The shelling of Damascus has also continued, reportedly killing over 30 people on 23 and 24 August. That tit-for-tat approach by the warring parties is causing devastation to the ordinary women, men and children of Syria, and it must stop.

The parties' callous disregard for human life and for basic survival seemingly knows no bounds. In early July, barrel bombs reportedly hit a shelter in the village of Al-Hawash, in Hama, killing five civilians. In Aleppo governorate, an alliance of armed groups, including the designated terrorist group the Al-Nusra Front, launched attacks on Government-controlled areas of Aleppo city, reportedly killing more than 30 civilians. Attacks on civilians are unlawful and unacceptable, and they must stop. I appeal to every party engaged in violence and fighting to protect civilians. All parties involved in violations of international humanitarian law must be held to account.

The destruction of civilian infrastructure continued over the reporting period. Non-State armed groups and designated terrorist groups deliberately cut access to essential services such as water and electricity. Such acts violate international humanitarian law and must be stopped immediately.

In Aleppo city, the water supply was cut from 2 to 18 July and again in early August — during the hottest months of the year — affecting an estimated 1.7 million people. Similarly, in Dar'a city and the surrounding villages, active fighting disrupted the supply of water and electricity for more than 10 days, affecting some 300,000 people. The city of Damascus was also affected by water disruptions, as non-State armed groups cut off the supply from the Wadi Barada springs, which provide water to Damascus. It is unconscionable to make anyone live under such conditions.

Despite the increasingly challenging environment, millions of people continue to receive lifesaving assistance using all available modalities, including across borders, pursuant to resolution 2165 (2014). During the first half of 2015, United Nations agencies

and non-governmental organizations provided food assistance for 5.9 million people on average per month, medicine and supplies for 9 million people, water and sanitation support for over 5 million people, and basic relief items for more than 4 million people.

While these numbers are significant, I regret to say that many more could be reached should unimpeded access be allowed. I am particularly concerned about the severely limited access to the 4.6 million people living in hard-to-reach and besieged areas. During the first half of 2015, each month the United Nations only reached 12 per cent of people in hard-to-reach areas with food, and 3.4 per cent with health supplies, which indicates major access challenges that limit the humanitarian community's ability to reach the most vulnerable and affected people in Syria.

Similarly, parties to the conflict continue to severely restrict access to besieged areas. Each month of the first half of this year, the United Nations managed to reach less than 1 per cent with food and non-food items, and 2 per cent with health supplies. In July, no food or other type of humanitarian assistance by the United Nations reached any besieged areas through official routes where some 422,000 people are located.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was able to access Yalda on 18 August, and again on 19 and 24 August, as well as today, to provide lifesaving health-care consultations for 1,000 people, and 200,000 water purification tablets. However, much more is needed, and I remain extremely concerned about the situation of Palestine refugees in Syria.

During my visit to Syria, I discussed with senior Government representatives the need to strengthen the protection of civilians and the overall humanitarian response. I urged the Government to grant full and unhindered access to all people in need wherever they may be located. It is my sincere hope that the necessary steps will be taken towards improving access, including approving requests for inter-agency and agency convoys.

I welcome the recent granting of the visas for United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs staff that had been pending for months. And with respect to visas, I have also just this minute received news from the Syrian Mission that the 47 pending visas for United Nations staff are going to be granted, following the specific request I made during my visit. We will seek official confirmation later today on this matter. I also welcome initial reports on the reduction in time to obtain approvals to import humanitarian supplies.

I also visited the Old City of Homs. I was utterly shocked to see the destruction that four years of fighting had brought about. Almost every home had been completely destroyed. I met with affected families and was able to hear their stories. I spoke with a man called Ahmed who told me his harrowing tale. Above all, he said, he wanted peace in his country. Despite the destruction and daily challenges, he and his family are glad to have been able to return to their home at last; they were among the first to do so. I will be travelling to Turkey and Jordan in September, where I will be able to see for myself the ongoing response efforts to meet the needs of the refugees and of the communities hosting them.

It is difficult to find words that would justly describe the depth of suffering that Syrians face on a daily basis. Having just returned from the country, I have seen a glimpse of this grim reality myself. I left the country deeply saddened and outraged by the needless and immense suffering of ordinary Syrians and the abhorrent destruction the conflict has wrought on the country. I am angry because we as the international community are not allowed, or able, to do more to protect Syrians who more than ever need our unfaltering support.

But I come away determined not to give up, not to be exasperated by the relentless repetitiveness of the challenges we as humanitarians face and the need to explore every avenue to do everything possible to provide lifesaving aid and protection to the people in need. I urge Council members to do everything in their power to end this crisis. With all the will in the world, humanitarian action cannot be a substitute for political action. The Council must exert leadership to push for a political solution.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to take this opportunity to express my country's warm welcome to Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. I

wish him complete success as he carries out the noble tasks he has set out to fulfil at this very difficult time.

This is a time of extremism and violence resulting in unprecedented levels of crime and very challenging humanitarian conditions in many countries. It is a time in which terrorism is being fuelled by the policy failures of several Governments. The victims are all our peoples. This terrorism is destroying our civilization and cultural heritage, just as it has done in many cities across Iraq. Recently, in Tadmor, Syria, terrorists destroyed the historic Temple of Bel-Shamin and killed one of Syria's most preeminent antiquities experts, Mr. Khaled Al-Asaad.

We consider Mr. O'Brien's visit in Syria, with his meetings and interviews with Syrian authorities, including in his visit to Homs, to be a greatly welcome preamble to putting things on the right path and strengthening our transparency in cooperating with the United Nations in the humanitarian context. We are comfortable with Mr. O'Brien's ideas on improving cooperation between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Syria. We expect those exchanges and discussions to remain ongoing for the benefit of Syria and its people.

In that regard, I would note that the Syrian Government will continue to cooperate with the United Nations to facilitate access to humanitarian assistance for all of its citizens victims of the crisis, wherever they are, in line with United Nations principles relating to humanitarian assistance in emergency situations, pursuant to resolution 46/182 of the General Assembly and taking into account Syria's sovereignty and territorial unity and integrity as well as the plans agreed with the Syrian Government.

This cooperation by the Syrian Government is only part of the overall humanitarian situation in Syria, which is dire as a result of foreign military interference in the country. That interference is the reason for the increase, fuelling and continuation of the phenomenon of terrorism in Syria and the region. It is also why progress has slowed on the political track. Therefore, foreign interference is the main reason for the emergence and prolongation of the humanitarian crisis being experienced in some parts of Syria. It is why we have been unable to make genuine, tangible and lasting improvements to the humanitarian situation. We will be unable to do so without putting an end to this blatant foreign interference in our economic, social and military affairs, or without ending the manifestations of support for terrorism, which is hindering progress on the political track and imposing obligatory measures on the Syrian people. In no region can human suffering be brought to an end solely by humanitarian assistance. Nevertheless, we are aware of the need for such assistance, which plays a major role in alleviating the suffering of our people. Developments have shown just how sound our reasoning is.

Despite all the humanitarian efforts undertaken, Syrians have not emerged from the crisis and from suffering. Refugees and persons displaced by terrorism have been unable to return to their homes and their daily lives. Peace and security have not been provided for the people and their children, except in the regions liberated by the Government and the Syrian army where peace and security were re-established after routing terrorists and where local and national reconciliation has taken place. That shows once again that Syrians are capable of talking to each other and solving their problems by themselves if foreign intervention ceases and if the Governments that protect terrorists commit themselves to end their bloody policies.

One, including members of the Security Council, cannot continue to hide behind what some are calling the moderate military opposition, which merely provides an excuse to use terrorists and extremists as ways and means to carry out their political agenda in Syria and other States. Those terrorist activities have been exposed to everyone: witness the so-called Jaish Al-Islam, which is linked to Saudia Arabia and is continuing to indiscriminately bomb the capital Damascus, which we are glad Mr. O'Brien mentioned; or the Jaish Al-Fatha, which is linked to Turkey and Qatar and is contituing to bomb Aleppo and Idlib; while the Jaish Al-Yarmouk, linked to Jordan and Israel, is destroying southern Syria. The question here is: Is the indiscriminate bombing of civilians in Damascus and Aleppo a practice of the moderate opposition? Between 23 and 24 August, such "moderate" opposition launched 92 mortars and missiles against Damascus, killing and injuring many civilians.

It is ironic that some members of the Security Council preach the protection of the Syrian people while they remain silent about those crimes — offering no condemnation and holding no emergency meeting to reject those acts. An exception, for which I am grateful, was the Council statement concerning what happened in the city of Palmyra/Tadmor, as was the case when water

was cut off from Damascus and Aleppo for weeks by a "moderate" military opposition that considers its tactics of killing, torture and slavery as acts of moderation and as a peaceful path to achieve democracy and freedom.

Why give legal standing and legitimacy to the moderate military opposition in Syria alone, and not in any other State? Why are we alone targeted with this invention of so-called moderate military opposition, while at the same time we are witnessing a campaign in the Western media to promote armed groups that have pledged allegience to Al-Qaida, such as the terrorist group Harakat Ahrar Al-Sham, which *The New York Times* has often commended, as in yesterday's issue, which I have with me here, as an "Ideal Syrian ally for [the] U.S."?

The bombing, which is targeting civilians in many cities in Syria, prompts me to refer to Syria's constitutional obligations and responsibilities to protect its citizens from terrorism and extremism. Many have accused the Syrian Government of targeting civilians in Duma and other cities. Like any other responsible Government in the world, including the members of the Security Council, we cannot sit by when terrorists target our civilians, as happens in Aleppo, Damascus and other Syrian cities. We have to respond to the source of the firing and shelling by the terrorists. As such, the Syrian army is acting in accordance with international law to combat terrorism and protect its civilians. This is not about attacking civilians, as some delegations falsely claim. Those who are killing civilians are those who are using them as human shields in Duma and other cities in Syria. As the Council is aware, that is similar to what Boko Haram is doing in Nigeria and neighbouring States.

Once again, the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/651) includes several gaps and erroneous information. As we have sent identical letters to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General on this issue, I will limit myself today to simply noting that there were 48 requests presented by the United Nations for access by humanitarian assistance convoys from 1 January to 30 June. Approval was granted in connection with 43 of those requests, not the mere 20 referred to in the report. Meanwhile, the United Nations has yet to avail itself of 10 of the approvals granted in April and June.

I would also like to point out that the Syrian Government has agreed to allow the entry of certain assistance to the cities of Harasta and Duma, Damascus governorate, as well as into Al-Fu'ah and Kafriya, Idlib governorate, and into all other areas where the situation is such that the security of humanitarian workers can be guaranteed. We are now considering several requests while taking into account various elements, including the security situation, in order to ensure access for humanitarian assistance to those who deserve it, and so that the assistance is not confiscated by terrorists. I would also like to say that, following Mr. O'Brien's visit to Syria, we approved all the requests for visas that were presented to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, including extending the visas of OCHA officials, which Mr. O'Brien did mention.

Lastly, there is an unacceptable legal violation in the Secretary-General's report with regard to the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014). Erroneous information, which may even be called scandalous, was deployed in the report to refer to terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham/Daesh and Jabhat Al-Nusra as non-State armed groups. As everyone here knows, those, as well as other Al-Qaida-associated groups, have been classified by the Council as terrorist groups. We therefore cannot accept calling the terrorists in Syria non-State armed groups — an incorrect description that violates Security Council resolutions aimed at combating terrorism.

Finally, on behalf of the Syrian Arab Republic, I would like once again to warmly welcome Mr. O'Brien's resolve, as well as to express our willingness to work with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to successfully bring to fruition the noble goal of providing humanitarian assistance to those who deserve it.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.